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SIBERIAN GAS PIPELINE

The Siberian gas pipeline is a test of many things: of whether U.S. foreign policy is made in Washington or in Europe, of whether we will reverse the obsequious and appeasing policy toward Russia of the previous administrations, of whether Western Europe is casting its future with America or with Russia, and of whether Ronald Reagan is master of his own Administration or the ultra-liberal press has a veto over his decisions.

So far, Reagan is batting 1000%. He made the right decision on the Siberian gas pipeline, and he accepted the resignation of Secretary of State Alexander Haig who was the principal advocate of the contrary policy.

In the pipeline controversy, "U.S. approval" should be realistically defined as follows: (1) guaranteeing credits to an uncreditworthy government (Russia), and (2) approving the shipment to Russia of important U.S. industrial technology which will enable the Soviets to make a tremendous advance in their industrial/military expansion plans.

The former will end up as a lug on the American taxpayer and the latter will cost the American taxpayers enormous sums to stay ahead of the weapons the Russians will build with this additional technology and expanded industrial-military energy base.

What have the Russians ever done for us that could justify such preferential treatment? The answer is: nothing at all.

The key component of the Siberian gas pipeline is a turbine manufactured by General Electric Company and by certain West European firms licensed by GE. Nobody else has a satisfactory substitute. The Russian-made turbines are not compatible with the other pipeline equipment and are so inferior that they don't even revolve the right way.

When the West European firms obtained the licenses for the GE turbines, they signed a written agreement not to sell them to the Russians without our consent. When the West Europeans say they intend to "honor" their pipeline commitments to Russia, that means they will dishonor their commitments to the United States.

Unable to give any good argument for why the U.S. should approve the Siberian pipeline, West European governments and their media friends have launched into a

nasty attack on the Reagan Administration and announced plans to defy America and sell our turbines to the Russians anyway. The French are talking about "a progressive divorce" from the United States.

Margaret Thatcher, using a 1980 law, has taken steps to order British companies not to comply with the Reagan embargo. Apparently, she has no sense of noblesse oblige. Her support of the Soviet Union on this issue comes with exceedingly poor grace after the Reagan Administration backed her invasion of the Falklands (even though our siding with her was highly detrimental to our relations with all of Latin America).

West European governments are pretending that the Siberian pipeline is mainly a benefit to them and that it is essential to their economies. That is not true. Only 15% of the pipeline gas is even planned to be for Europe; the rest is for Russia. If West Europeans need additional energy supplies, they should be buying American coal (of which we have a tremendous abundance) rather than Siberian gas.

After weeks this summer of several articles a day attacking Reagan in the major European newspapers, the U.S. Ambassador to France, Evan Galbraith, made a statement for publication to try to help Europeans to understand why America opposes the pipeline. "Like Braniff airlines," Mr. Galbraith explained, "they (the Russians) have extended themselves at the wrong time in the business cycle. Their cash flow is down. ... Poor harvests, the economic problems of Poland and Eastern Europe and the cost of their Cuban and Afghan adventures have aggravated the situation. Consequently, the credit standing of the Soviet Union" is such that it could not get a bank loan on commercial terms.

Ambassador Galbraith pointed out that "the Russians are in economic trouble for reasons of their own doing, which are inherent in their system. The United States is perfectly justified in refusing actively to facilitate the quantum leap forward that will come from the Russians' expanded use of gas."

The deep divisions and the intemperate outbursts among our so-called friends prove two things: (1) Western European governments serve their own selfish interests and are not willing to bend to accommodate U.S. interests by one iota for the sake of old friendships, past obligations, or future cooperation; and (2) West European governments are more afraid of offending Russia than of offending America. Maybe it's good that the Siberian pipeline has exposed the disloyalty of our Western European "friends."